

GOVERNMENT PROTECTIVE MEASURES AGAINST
CHOLERA. — INSPECTORS. — QUARANTINE. —
COAST PATROL. — RAG EMBARGO.

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Mr. Editor.—Agreeably with your suggestion I transmit the following summary of the protective measures against cholera which have been put into execution by the National Government during the present year.

First may be mentioned the Sanitary Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State upon the request of the Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service in Toulon, Marseilles, Cette, Bourdeaux and Havre, Hamburg, Antwerp and Rotterdam, and in Liverpool and London. These inspectors have been attached to the consulates of the cities named and their examination of both persons and cargoes of all vessels has been a prerequisite to the granting of the consular bills of health.

Secondly, National Maritime Quarantines have been maintained at the Delaware Breakwater, Cape Charles, Sapelo, Ship Island and Egmont Key, Fla. The quarantine expenses of Pensacola have also been met by the General Government, the Governor of Florida having certified that his state has no fund with which to maintain this station.

A Third precaution has been the coast patrol by the vessels of the Revenue Marine Service which were ordered to ply on the outermost border of their cruising grounds, to hail incoming vessels and direct those with sickness on board to the proper anchorage for quarantine examination.

The National Quarantine Service has been administered during the past three years by the medical bureau of the Treasury Department, the Marine Hospital Service. The facilities at the command

of Surgeon-General Hamilton are in part shown in the above lines and may be reviewed as follows:

First, Information from Foreign Ports is promptly transmitted by telegraph or letter by Government Consuls through the State Department. Through this same department also preventive measures are extended abroad.

Second, Information from Home Ports is obtained from Collectors and Surveyors of Customs, who also in their right of search and detention of vessels are potential agents.

Third, As Naval Aids may be mentioned the Revenue Marine Service with its well equipped steamers guarding the entire coast, and the Coast Survey and Light House Establishments whose charts and signal lights and services in buoying out channels have been of great value.

Finally, For Professional Work, there is available the Marine Hospital Service, whose physicians, numbering about one hundred and sixty are stationed in every seaport, and are especially acquainted with local health laws and accustomed to the transaction of public business.

A word as to the laws under which national quarantine is administered. There are three, viz.,

First, The law of February 25, 1799, subsequently embodied in section 4792 of the Revised Statutes, directing that State Health Laws shall be observed by United States officials as directed from time to time by the Secretary of the Treasury, and authorizing the erection of quarantine warehouses.

Second, The law of April 29, 1878, passed when the Russian plague was imminent, and forbidding or restraining the entry of vessels from infected ports. One portion of this law specifying its executive officer was repealed in 1879, but its restrictive clauses are still in force. Its execution was transferred by the temporary act of June 2, 1879, to the National Board of Health, but this function and all other executive powers of the National Board expired by limitation June 3, 1883.

Third, The acts of 1883 and 1884 authorizing the President to use a sum not exceeding one hundred thousand dollars in aid of local boards or otherwise in preventing and suppressing epidemic disease. It is this fund which is now being used by the Marine Hospital Service.

The position of the Government toward the States in matter of quarantine is that of a strong ally supplying help where needed and in the absence of local quarantine assuming control and responsibility. Even in the latter event care is taken to be in harmony so far as possible with ports affected by the quarantine and, for illustration I may state that the station most recently established by the Government, that at the Delaware Breakwater, was opened at the request of the Boards of Health of Lewes, Wilmington and Philadelphia and with the advice of Senator Bayard of Delaware. Any policy more radical than this must call for such an adjudication of the respective claims of commerce, sanitation and the constitution as has never yet been successfully made.

A *Fourth* measure is the embargo on rags, also the circular of July 2 requiring Collectors of Customs to refuse entry to all baggage shipped from infected districts subsequent to June 20, until the same has been certified as innocuous by the local quarantine officer.

One of the most troublesome matters before the department this year has been the controversy over the embargo on rags furnishing a typical illustration of the irrepressible conflict between trade and sanitation. A review of Government interference in the rag trade takes us back to March 3, 1879, when by direction of Surgeon-General Woodworth, M. H. S., restrictions were placed upon rag importation, which restrictions were removed after a period of three months because of the summary extinction of the Russian plague by means of the military cordon and burning of infected houses with their contents. Last year during the quarantine season of 1883, the cholera prevailing in Egypt, the Collectors of Customs were ordered to refuse entry to all Egyptian rags until the municipal health authorities had furnished written certificates that in their opinion no danger would result from the discharge of the cargo, thus placing the responsibility and supervision of disinfection upon the city authorities.

During the present year the rag question has assumed its greatest importance. As early as April 22, before the appearance of cholera in Southern France, a provisional embargo was placed upon rags from infected ports. The infected ports were then supposed to be in Egypt only, and as a large proportion of the rag importation is from this country, regulations were made requiring specific methods of

disinfection before shipment under the supervision of a Government inspector at Cairo, whose certificates were authenticated by the Consul General. But Congress having failed to make further provision for a Consul General at Cairo this plan was necessarily abandoned July 19.

A circular, however, was issued on this same date—the cholera in the mean time having appeared in France—prohibiting “the unloading of rags from infected ports and of rags which are suspected on good grounds of being infected from any foreign port.”

The above order it may be seen was capable of wide application but on September 1 a still more stringent one was made, entirely prohibiting the importation of rags for a period of three months, the intention being to act upon the safe side until the meeting of Congress which must then assume the responsibility.

For a full account of the controversy which followed this order I may refer to the New York Herald of dates from October 9 to 16.

The paper manufacturers complained of serious injury to their trade.

There are said to be 1,100 paper mills in the country, employing 100,000 people and a capital of \$800,000,000 and of the 260,000 tons of rags annually used 84,000 tons are imported. These statements show the interests at stake, but to my mind give additional reason for the strictest surveillance. Last month, however, the then secretary, Hon. Mr. Gresham, saw fit to modify the order, but the present secretary, the Hon. Hugh McCullough, acting on the petition of a number of prominent New York physicians and on the advice of the Surgeon-General, M. H. S., has made the embargo more stringent by circular dated November 15.

It is hoped that the ultimate effect of the controversy will be to insure a thorough cleaning and disinfection of all rags before their shipment to this country.

W. W.